

The GRANGE

Issue: 86

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CHAIR'S REPORT

However, many, many people took advantage of the "free" day to come to the Gallery and to The Grange. In fact, The Grange count of visitors was over 1,300, give or take a few. As all volunteers know, when so many visitors come in at once it's difficult to keep the clicker going fast enough. We certainly can consider the day a success though, a great many people talked at length with the artists and the volunteers. The artists' talks on the following days were also well attended by people obviously very interested.

Now we are at the end of November. Last week was Members' Shopping Week and, most importantly for The Grange, the launch of the book/catalogue, *House Guests, The Grange 1817 to Present*. It's a beautiful book, the photographs are magnificent and the text interesting and informative. I wasn't able to attend the actual launch on November 21st, with reception and talk by Charlotte Gray, I was suffering from a sore throat and cold and I did not think my coughing and spluttering would be welcome, however, I am told that it went extremely well. And, that Charlotte's illustrated talk was enjoyable. That report I have had from several sources!

Coming up next, of course, Christmas! You will see the House decorated a little differently this year. Partly because we cannot detract from the installations and the artists' conceptions but partly because Jenny has been doing considerable research into the Christmas customs of the period. She has come to the conclusion that Christmas was a good deal simpler in the early nineteenth century, not a commercial event as it is now.

I too have been doing a little research. I found an absolute gem of a book called *The Handbook of Toronto* published in 1858, and full of facts and figures about the City at that time. Here are a couple of quotes from the book.

Page 150 re: Toronto's water supply:

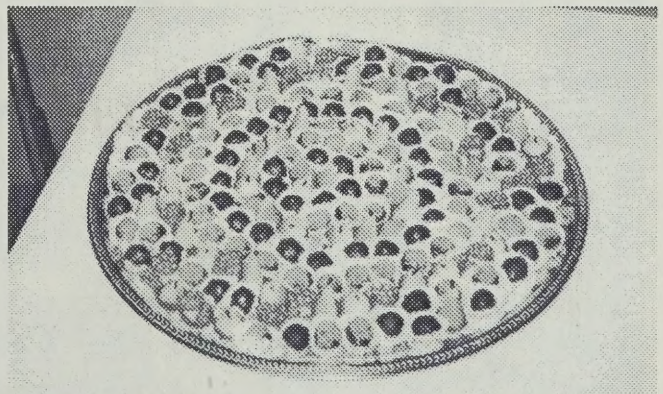
Toronto is miserably ill supplied with water, both as to quality and quantity, although in the Great Lake which forms our southern bulwark we have an abundant and unfailing source of pure and wholesome water. However, the article goes to acknowledge the untreated sewage is emptied into the Lake!!!

Page 195-6 An account of the first Provincial Exhibition, October 21st and 22nd 1846. An address by The Honourable Adam Fergusson went, in part as follows.

Canada, though thousands in Britain, wrapped in wilful darkness, shiver at its name, ignorant alike to its real capabilities and value is nevertheless blessed with every advantage which can minister to the comfort of man. Let only her religious and moral culture keep some adequate pace with her temporal improvement, and who shall dare to assign bounds to her advances in civilization and wealth...

What more can I say? "Happy Holidays"

- Avril Stringer, *The Grange Chair*



The Grange Annual Volunteer Christmas Party

Chocolate truffles, marzipan fruits and fairy mushrooms by Ena Tutins, Friday volunteer. Ena was a confectioner before she retired.



YOUNG VOLUNTEER AT THE GRANGE

Jeremy Dion-Holdom (right) stands with fellow Wednesday evening volunteer, Justin Blathwayt. Jeremy wears a shirt made by volunteer Linda Tyrrell also of the Wednesday evening group. Jeremy has been part of the Wednesday evening crew since he was 2 years old, under the guidance of his mother Francine. One of his favourite pastimes is to join his fellow volunteers at Frecklebean Cafe for a snack on Wednesday nights.



The Grange Annual Christmas Gathering

Mr and Mrs. Peter Stokes (on the left) stand with Wanda Dube, President of the AGO Volunteers at The Grange Annual Volunteer Christmas Party held Monday, December 10, 2001 at The Grange.

The Grange Volunteer Executive 2001-2002

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Monday: Jane Heinemann
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Wednesday: Cathy Stroud
Wednesday Bridge: Helvi Hunter
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Thursday: June O'Brien
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- Jenny Rieger, Curatorial Assistant -

How quickly Christmas comes around and how un-Christmas like it feels outside of The Grange. As many of you may know, I am a lover of Christmas-except in 1830s houses where I am beginning to get the reputation of being Scrooge-like (1843)! The beautifully decorated historic house Christmas beloved by so many of us, can't happen at The Grange. We are just the wrong time period.

I spent quite a bit of time this fall researching diaries, account books, periodicals, Christmas books and other sites to find out what we should look like. Christmas decorating and celebrating varies from one ethnic group to another and from one time period to another. The Dutch, German and Moravian settlers to the new world brought many wonderful traditions with them. Presbyterians, Baptists and Congregationalists ignored Christmas entirely seeing it as just another work day. In British North America there were no school holidays and people were required to work on Christmas, unless it fell on a Sunday. In England, traditional holidays were being done away with -- 40 in 1825 down to 4 in 1834. The Poor Law Act of 1833 had a clause forbidding extra dinners on Christmas, unless provided by a private individual.

But, all this gloom aside, what would Christmas look like in The Grange in 1835? The mantel would be decorated with evergreen and greenery would rest on the tops of pictures and mirrors. I have not been able to find out too much about wreaths although the tradition of an advent wreath is an old one. It is unlikely that the stairs would be decorated. We know that there would be gifts exchanged but no Christmas tree. Perhaps the family might have had a Kissing Bough - a sphere covered with evergreen with hanging apples in the centre.

This was a grown up family. William and D'Arcy Edward were in their 20s, Mary, Emma and John were in their late teens and Sarah was 11. They would have attended church at St. James on King St. and returned home to a lavish dinner. Afterwards the family would have gathered in the drawing room to play games (my favourite being Snap Dragon which required the removal of raisins from a flaming bowl!), sing songs and act in charades. Can you imagine it?

On behalf of myself and the staff of the Art Gallery of Ontario I wish you and those you love a happy, safe and joyous holiday.

Our Daily Bread

On Monday November 5, 2001 at 9pm, CBC radio featured the program "Our Daily Bread".

A feast for all five senses. Our staff of lunch and life. Amy Jo Ehman kneads the multiple roles of homemade bread - cultural, spiritual and physical - and finds it tasty, no matter how you slice it.

Grange volunteer and master of our bake oven, Al de Matos was interviewed for this program. The following are notes from Al on his experience.

Back in the spring of this year a journalist visited The Grange. She wanted to learn about the use of the 1817 kitchen and bread making. Although I was a bit apprehensive and shy, I agreed to do an interview with Jenny's consent.

I explained the weekly bread preparation techniques, whilst she recorded my response to her questions. I also described the basic utensils and their use 'below stairs'.

Six months later, the interview was broadcast on CBC radio. My day captain, June, informed me that it was on and gave very positive feedback. Unfortunately I was not able to tune-in. I feel gratification, however, knowing that prominent radio personnel showed interest in history of this kind. After all, knowledge of one of the first brick homes in Toronto may add to more public visits. In turn, it validates the necessity of maintaining traditional customs and values at The Grange.

As a volunteer who has served 7 & 1/2 years, I still feel pride. Every day I interpret to the guests is an added bonus for me. I look forward to future baking endeavours.

Long live the memories of our "Privileged Few"!

Sincerely, Al de Matos

REMINDER

Please submit your news articles for the next Grange newsletter by
Friday, March 8, 2001.

Boxing Day

The name of Boxing Day comes from the need to rid the house of empty boxes the day after Christmas. Wrong.

Boxing Day is celebrated in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and Canada, not all that many in those countries have much of a notion as to why they get the 26 of December off. Boxing Day might well be a statutory holiday in some of those lands, but it's not a well understood one.

Despite the lively images suggested by the name, it has nothing to do with pugilistic expositions between tanked-up family members who have dearly been looking forward to taking a round out of each other for the past year. Likewise, it does not gain its name from the overpowering need to rid the house of an excess of wrappings and mountains of now useless cardboard boxes the day after St. Nick arrived to turn a perfectly charming and orderly home into a maelstrom of discarded tissue paper.

The name also has nothing to do with returning unwanted gifts to the stores they came from, hence its common association with hauling about boxes on the day after Christmas.

The holiday's roots can be traced to Britain, where Boxing Day is also known as St. Stephen's Day. Good King Wenceslas' gifts of bread, wine, and firewood were made to a poor man whom he observed struggling through the snow "on the Feast of Stephen." Reduced to the simplest essence, its origins are found in a long-ago practice of giving cash or durable goods to those of the lower classes. Gifts among equals were exchanged on or before Christmas Day, but beneficences to those less fortunate were bestowed the day after.

And that's about as much as anyone can definitively say about its origin because once you step beyond that point, it's straight into the quagmire of debated claims and dueling folklorists. Which, by the way, is what we're about to muddy our boots with.

Although there is general agreement that the holiday is of British origin and it has to do with giving presents to the less fortunate, there is still dispute as to how the name came about or precisely what unequal relationship is being recognized.

At various times, the following "origins" have been loudly asserted as the correct one:

Centuries ago, ordinary members of the merchant class gave boxes of food and fruit to tradespeople and servants the day after Christmas in an ancient form of Yuletide tip. These gifts were an expression of gratitude to those who worked for them, in much the same way that one now tips the paperboy an extra \$20 at Christmastime or slips the building's superintendent a bottle of fine whisky. Those long-ago gifts were done up in boxes, hence the day coming to be known as "Boxing Day."

Christmas celebrations in the old days entailed bringing everyone together from all over a large estate, thus creating one of the rare instances when everyone could be found in one place at one time. This gathering of his extended family, so to speak, presented the lord of the manor with a ready-made

opportunity to easily hand out that year's stipend of necessities. Thus, the day after Christmas, after all the partying was over and it was almost time to go back to far-flung homesteads, serfs were presented with their annual allotment of practical goods. Who got what was determined by the status of the worker and his relative family size, with spun cloth, leather goods, durable food supplies, tools, and whatnot being handed out. Under this explanation, there was nothing voluntary about this transaction; the lord of the manor was obligated to supply these goods. The items were chucked into boxes, one box for each family, to make carrying away the results of this annual restocking easier; thus, the day came to be known as "Boxing Day."

Many years ago, on the day after Christmas, servants in Britain carried boxes to their masters when they arrived for the day's work. It was a tradition that on this day all employers would put coins in the boxes, as a special end-of-the-year gift. In a closely-related version of this explanation, apprentices and servants would on that day get to smash open small earthenware boxes left for them by their masters. These boxes would house small sums of money specifically left for them.

This dual-versioned theory melds the two previous ones together into a new form; namely, the employer who was obligated to hand out something on Boxing Day, but this time to recipients who were not working the land for him and thus were not dependent on him for all they wore and ate. The "box" thus becomes something beyond ordinary compensation (in a way goods to landed serfs was not), yet it's also not a gift in that there's nothing voluntary about it. Under this theory, the boxes are an early form of Christmas bonus, something employees see as their entitlement.

Boxes in churches for seasonal donations to the needy were opened on Christmas Day, and the contents distributed by the clergy the following day. The contents of this alms box originated with the ordinary folks in the parish who were thus under no direct obligation to provide anything at all and were certainly not tied to the recipients by a employer/employee relationship. In this case, the "box" in "Boxing Day" comes from that one gigantic lockbox the donations were left in.

Whichever theory one chooses to back, the one thread common to all is the theme of one-way provision to those not inhabiting the same social level. As mentioned previously, equals exchanged gifts on Christmas Day or before, but lessers (be they tradespeople, employees, servants, serfs, or the generic "poor") received their "boxes" on the day after. It is to be noted that the social superiors did not receive anything back from those they played Lord Bountiful to: a gift in return would have been seen as a presumptuous act of laying claim to equality, the very thing Boxing Day was an entrenched bastion against. Boxing Day was, after all, about preserving class lines.

See sources at: www.snopes2.com/holidays/xmas/boxing.htm
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